CWD MANAGEMENT

September 29, 2017

Dear Montana Processor:

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) is resuming active surveillance for chronic wasting disease (CWD) in mule deer beginning this fall, 2017. CWD is a fatal, neurologic disease of deer, elk, and moose that can cause population-level declines of these species. We will be rotating our efforts among priority surveillance areas, starting with the hunting districts that fall within **Park, Sweet Grass, Stillwater, Carbon, Golden Valley, Musselshell and Yellowstone counties**. During this effort, we would like to ask for your help, notify you of what to expect, and suggest 'best practices' in the context of CWD.

How you can help

It is in the best interest of all Montanans to support FWPs efforts to look for, and manage CWD. Without management, CWD will likely spread, increase in prevalence, and cause population declines in deer and elk as has been observed in other states. The sooner we detect CWD, the better our chances are to effectively manage the disease.

There are several ways in which you can help:

1. You can help notify your clients that FWP is interested in sampling and testing deer, elk, or moose harvested from any of our priority surveillance hunt districts (see attached map). You can encourage them to bring the head of their animal to a regional FWP office for sampling. Any animal collected outside of this year's CWD priority surveillance area will have to be submitted and tested at the hunter's expense.
2. Place CWD informational cards at your front desk. FWP will supply the informational cards.
3. If you are particularly keen to help and would be willing to work closely with FWP, we are looking for processors near or within our priority surveillance areas that are willing to either:
    a. Let FWP staff set up a sampling station outside of their shop where we could intercept hunters to ask for their voluntary participation, or
    b. Work with hunters directly to fill out a data card with precise location information and save tagged heads in a barrel for FWP to collect on a regular basis.

What to expect

You may start seeing deer, elk, or moose arrive at your shop with a special yellow ID tag, reading "MTFWP CWD TEST." This tag indicates that the animal has been sampled for CWD by FWP. Test results will be delivered to hunters within 3 weeks of sampling.

If an animal tests positive for CWD, the hunter will be advised not to consume the meat based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Although there are no known cases of

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humans contracting CWD, health officials are advising caution. If the positive animal was processed at a commercial facility, we will notify the processor of the positive test and work with the processor to determine whether the animal was processed in a batch with other animals. Any hunter that received meat that was processed as part of a CWD-positive batch will be contacted and advised not to consume their meat. Thus, it is important to maintain good record keeping as to which hunters' animals were processed together. Similarly, we would advise processing a manageable number of animals in one batch such that a positive test would affect a limited number of people.

Best practices in the context of CWD

CWD is caused by infectious mis-folded proteins (not a bacteria, virus, or fungus) called "prions" that are extremely resistant to conventional disinfecting techniques (e.g. bleach, boiling water, etc.). CWD prions are found throughout the body of an infected animal, but are most concentrated in the brain, spinal cord and lymph nodes. Although conventional cleaning and disinfecting techniques are unlikely to inactivate or remove all prions, we recommend the following practices to limit human exposure and inadvertent environmental transmission:

- Follow normal cleaning/disinfecting protocols.
- Dispose of all large tissue or carcass waste (bone, etc) in a landfill. Infectious tissues or carcass parts that are improperly disposed of may contribute to ongoing environmental transmission of CWD to deer, elk, or moose.
- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection when processing wild game.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after processing is completed.
- Avoid processing/consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals.

Please let us know if you are interested in helping. We are extremely appreciative of any cooperation on this issue.

Sincerely,

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Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' CWD FAQs

Q. What is Chronic Wasting Disease and how do deer, elk and moose catch it?

A. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is one type of a class of diseases called Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies, or TSEs, that infect members of the deer family, including deer, elk, moose, and caribou. TSEs are caused by infectious, mis-folded prion proteins, which cause normal prion proteins throughout a healthy animal's body to mis-fold, resulting in organ damage and eventual death. These prions are found throughout bodily tissues and secretions and are shed into the environment before and after death. When other animals come in contact with the prions, either from infected live animals or from contaminated environments, they can be infected. The disease is slow acting, degenerative and always fatal. The name comes from the appearance of symptomatic animals, which get very skinny and sick-looking before they die.

Q. How will CWD impact deer and elk herds?

A. The short answer is we don't know yet. If CWD infects enough animals it will probably reduce the herd in the long term. Other states have seen deer populations decline when CWD infects 20 to 40 percent of a herd. In Wyoming, heavily-infected herds of mule deer declined 21 percent *per year* and whitetails 10 percent. Colorado saw a 45% decline in infected mule deer herds over 20 years. Clearly, if left unchecked CWD could result in large-scale population declines.

Because the distribution and intensity of CWD infections are variable across a broad landscape, the impacts across the landscape will also be variable. Keeping deer numbers down and dispersed, and reducing buck: doe ratios, may keep the prevalence low and manageable. FWP's focus will be on managing CWD infected areas for prevalence at 5 percent or lower and preventing spread. This may also mean keeping deer or elk numbers low.

Q. Can humans be infected by CWD?

A. There is no known transmission of CWD to humans. However, the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend not consuming meat from an animal known to be infected with CWD. Furthermore, the CDC recommends that hunters strongly consider having their animals tested before eating the meat when hunting in areas where CWD is known to be present.

Some simple precautions should be taken when field dressing deer, particularly in CWD surveillance areas:

- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection when field dressing your deer.
- Minimize the handling of brain and spinal tissues.
- Wash hands and instruments thoroughly after field dressing is completed.
- Avoid consuming brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils and lymph nodes of harvested animals. (Normal field dressing coupled with boning out of a carcass will essentially remove these parts.)

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Q. Is CWD dangerous to pets or livestock?

A. Currently, no evidence exists that domestic pets, companion animals, or livestock can be infected with CWD. Natural transmission of CWD to other North American animals outside the cervid family has not been found.

Q. How do you test for CWD?

A. The standard test is to look at an animal's retropharyngeal lymph nodes or brainstem for evidence of CWD. These samples can only be collected from dead animals and are submitted to a certified CWD-testing diagnostic laboratory. Unfortunately, there are no non-invasive CWD tests for live animals. For research purposes, rectal or tonsil biopsies from live animals will work, but these tests are less sensitive and require capture, anesthesia, and minor surgery, making them impractical for widespread surveillance.

Q. Why should Ranchers and Farmers care about CWD?

A. Hunters are a key tool FWP uses to help rancher, farmers and other landowners manage the impact of wildlife on their property and to their crops and livestock. If CWD were to increase in prevalence, FWP anticipates some localized decline in hunting interest. Additionally, in many parts of the state property values are tied to existing recreational values. Hunting and wildlife viewing are key components. If CWD was left unmanaged and prevalence were to increase uncontrolled, it may impact property values.

Recent research has shown that plants, including plants used for livestock food, can uptake CWD prions from the soil. If continued research shows that animals can catch CWD by eating infected plants, it could have huge repercussions on the agricultural industry. Concerns nationally and internationally about CWD transmission through feed has may states and other countries to restrict the sale of such products from CWD positive areas. It is already the case that deer and elk protein, mostly from game farms, from CWD areas cannot be used in livestock feed.

Q. Why should Business owners care about CWD?

A. In Montana, outfitting and hunting make significant contributions to local economies. Across the state deer, elk and antelope hunting brings in about $400 million. This includes hotels, restaurants and gas stations in big and small communities. We anticipate the possibility that CWD will initially chill interest in deer hunting in the affected area. However, effective management will require participation from hunters and support from communities.

Q. Where does CWD come from?

A. The origin of CWD is unknown. It was discovered in 1967 in mule deer at a research facility in Colorado. Shortly thereafter it was also found in captive mule deer and elk in Ontario, Colorado, and Wyoming. By the 1990s it was discovered in wild white-tailed and mule deer, elk, and moose in Colorado and Wyoming and among captive animals in Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Montana, and Oklahoma. By the early 2000s, CWD was found in the wild in Saskatchewan and Alberta and Illinois and Wisconsin.

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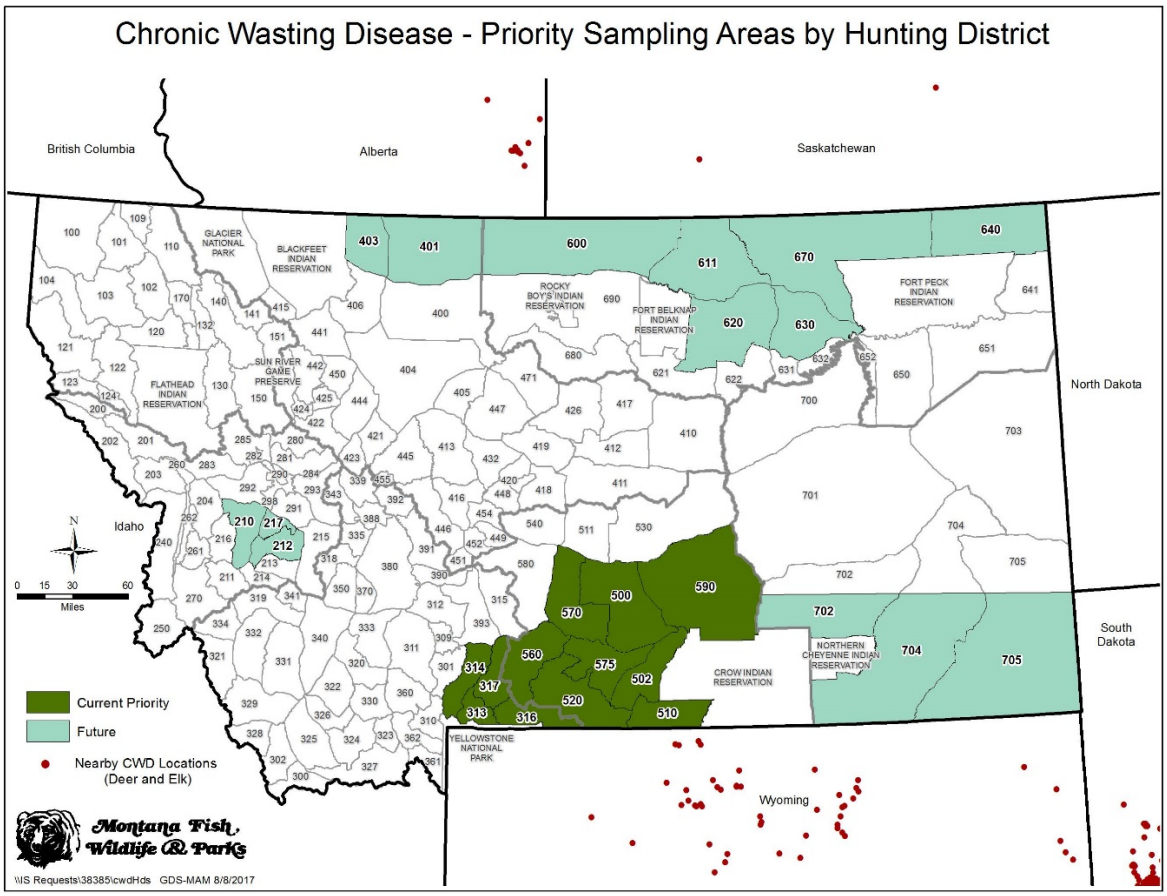
CWD has continued to spread. As of 2017 it is in captive or free-ranging herds in 24 states, three Canadian provinces, Norway and South Korea. While it has not been found among wild deer or elk in Montana yet, it will likely arrive from infected wild animals in neighboring states or provinces.

Q. Can CWD be eradicated?

A. After decades of CWD management across the country, most agencies and researchers agree that CWD cannot be eradicated once it infects a herd. Eradication is not the goal of FWP. Other states have attempted eradication and set up unreasonable expectations with hunters and the public. Once it is found here FWP's goal is to limit the prevalence and spread of CWD.

Q. Where is Montana looking for CWD?

A. Montana FWP has identified priority surveillance areas in which we will be focusing our surveillance efforts (map below). These areas have been identified as those at highest risk of becoming infected through the natural spread of the disease. Since CWD could be spread through the inadvertent or illegal movement of a CWD positive deer or elk carcass into the state, we also plan to periodically survey other areas of the state that fall outside of the high priority surveillance zones.



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